

Soldiers prepare life-saving equipment

*By Sgt. Chris Carney, 367th MPAD
Red Dragon*

FORT McCOY, Wis. - “All ready on the right side; left side ready. Everybody good? Alright, one, two, three...” and up goes a simple-looking tent that can mean the difference between life and death in a catastrophe.

The “Drash” tent that Sgt. Thomas Horton, Santee, S.C., and fellow Soldiers from the 414th Chemical Company raised is one stop in the process that chemical units use to treat casualties after a man-made disaster such as an industrial spill or a terrorist attack.

The 414th, from Orangeburg, S.C., and other Army reserve chemical units from around the country have converged at Fort McCoy, Wis., for two weeks of preparation and training, culminating in “Red Dragon,” a joint military and civilian exercise to simulate – and evaluate their readiness to handle – a catastrophe of a chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and high yield (CBRNE) nature.

By working with civilian agencies the Army Reserve can assess the level of cooperation that exists between responders who have to deal with the ever increasing threat of a catastrophe, and improve future operations.

The setting up of equipment before Red Dragon provides an opportunity to train Soldiers with the assets of their jobs, as well as providing a chance for the inspection of the equipment that may save the lives of victims of a disaster.

“The intention... [of the drash tents]... is to have a closed system where everything going in is dirty... or contaminated, and everything going out is clean and you do not have cross contamination”, said Sgt. Taylor Legget, Nashville, Tenn., 414th Chemical Company.

The decontamination process is run like an assembly line through three Drash tents.

“In the first tent the casualty removes clothing and gear that may be contaminated,” said Legget. “They then move to the second tent where the person is washed and cleaned. The third tent is the final wash station.”

There are many factors involved in running a decontamination operation that can make things more difficult and the chemical units have to be trained to deal with all of them.

For example, casualties may not be able to move on their own, and have to be moved through the steps on a litter or rollers.

The weather plays a big role as well, since an incident can break out in any part of

the country. If the temperature is hot, more soldiers are needed to rotate in and out to get the job done, especially with Soldiers wearing protective gear, in which temperatures quickly rise to almost unbearable levels.

The new tents are a big improvement over the GP Medium, a large, heavy-canvas tent that was used before the Drash tent.

"They're a lot easier than putting up a GP medium. All you have to do is pull the tent up, strap the tent down and you're good," said Legget.

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Photos:



Members of the 414th Chemical Company, Orangeburg, S.C., raise a Drash tent, used in the decontamination of casualties after a HAZMAT incident. The Soldiers are attached to the 415th Chemical Brigade for Operation Red Dragon, an exercise designed to prepare Army Reserve forces for cooperation with civilian agencies during a national emergency, at Fort McCoy, Wis.



Members of the 414th Chemical Company, Orangeburg, S.C., raise a Drash Tent, used in the decontamination of casualties after a HAZMAT incident. The Soldiers are attached to the 415th Chemical Brigade for Operation Red Dragon, an exercise designed to prepare Army Reserve forces for cooperation with civilian agencies during a national emergency, at Fort McCoy, Wis.



Sgt. Thomas Horten, Nashville, Tenn. prepare to raise a Drash tent, used in the decontamination of casualties after a HAZMAT incident. Horten is attached to the 415th Chemical Brigade for Operation Red Dragon, an exercise designed to prepare Army Reserve forces for cooperation with civilian agencies during a national emergency, at Fort McCoy, Wis.